

06-3003-3003

[0001] The present invention relates methods of providing information over the Internet and more particularly relates to providing a user with a personalized Internet experience responsive to the user's interests and background.

[0003] In order to take advantage of the ability to reach certain consumers on the Internet, advertisers frequently profile users in order to estimate a user's interest in a particular product. These profiling techniques are often used to help an advertiser select a particular advertisement to be presented to a user. There presently exist many different profiling techniques including using hypertext transfer protocol (HTTP) information, digital identification, geographic information and demographic information.

[0005] U.S. Patent 6,009,410 to LeMole et al. discloses a system that presents customized advertisements to users on the

that the host web site may gather information about the user's interests and preferences. As a result, when the user returns to the host web site at a future date, the content of the information displayed to the user will be modified so that the content of the information substantially matches the user's interests and/or personal demographic data. If the user declines to complete the personal data registration form, then the user may continue to review the material presented by the host web site. In this particular scenario, the host web site will not compile personal and/or demographic information about the user or the user's web surfing preferences.

[0008] If the user does complete the personal data registration form, then the host web site will transmit a cookie to the user's hardware. The cookie may be stored in the user's hard drive. The user will then complete the personal data registration form that preferably includes information such as the user's name, address, zip code, telephone number, e-mail address, age and occupation. As the user completes the personal data registration form, the personal data will be recorded on the user's cookie. The data recorded on the cookie will be transmitted to the host web site. The cookie information including the personal data is preferably recorded in one or more databases maintained by the host web site so that the information can be retrieved and updated each time a user access the host web site. Upon receiving the personal data, the host web site will process the information and store it in a database. In certain preferred embodiments, each user may be indexed by one or more components of the personal data (e.g. by last name or social security number).

[0009] In certain preferred embodiments, a user may be assigned a unique identity that is linked to the personal computer (PC) used to access the host web site. For example, a user may visit business related web sites from a first PC at work and entertainment related sites from a second PC at home. The host web site of the present invention desirably assigns a first

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[0018] By using Internet 102, a user is able to obtain access to a wide variety of web sites, such as by specifying the URL address of a desired web site or by conducting a key word search. A browser within the user-end terminal 100 sends a request over the Internet 102 to an identified Internet Service Provider (ISP) for that specific page. The requested page, as identified by the user-inputted URL address, is in turn transmitted back over the Internet 102 through IASP 104 to user-end terminal 100 for display on the user's terminal. By subsequently inputting a series of URL addresses manually through the browser or by clicking the user-end terminal's mouse on a hyperlink, or through a combination of both, the user is able to navigate through a wide variety of URL addressed pages of information at ISP 106 and any of the other ISPs, such as ISPs 108 and 110, connected to the Internet 102. Thus, a user may "surf the Net" in order to receive information, make on-line purchases and/or access on-line services.

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related to one or more users in database 128. The personal data may serve as an index for retrieving a profile on each user. The profile will preferably include information related to the user's interests, likes and preferences, such information being gathered by monitoring the user's Internet activities. Each time a user revisits the host web site 124, the host server 126 will operate to retrieve any new information available on the profiled user. As a result, the material transmitted by the host web site to the user at the user-end terminal 100 may be personalized and/or modified so that the material presented to the user is related to the user's Internet interests.

[0020] Referring to Figure 2, in accordance with one preferred embodiment of the present invention, a user visits a host web site 124 (Figure 1) at step 202. The host web site may provide a wide variety of information, such as the Internet web site having the URL SONYSTYLE.COM, owned and operated by Sony Electronics of America. At step 204, the user will be queried as to whether he or she wishes to register personal data to be stored by the host web site. Unlike prior art methods that obtain identifying information about a user without the user's knowledge or consent, the present invention will only seek to obtain information about the user if the user fully understands and authorizes such action.

[0021] If the user agrees to register personal data with the host web site, the host web site transmits a cookie via the Internet to the user's hardware. As used herein, the term "cookie" means information that a web site stores on a user's hard disk so that the web site can identify the user and/or retrieve information about the user at a later time. In other words, a cookie is information for future use that is stored by a server on the client's side of a client/server communication. Cookies are commonly used to rotate banner ads that a web site sends to a user so that the web site does not keep sending the same ad to the user. Cookies may also be used to customized

